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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: SOUTHWEST POLITICS UPENDED AS
POLL DEADLINE APPROACHES

1. (U) SUMMARY. The April 19 gubernatorial and presidential election will be a remarkable test of incumbent power-players and ethnic politics in the Southwest. After stunning defeats in the National Assembly elections on April 12, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) is fighting for its political life. Free and fair or not, the public will judge the relative strength of candidates and entrenched interest groups from the outcome. Although the AD is encouraging its supporters to cast a protest vote against Obasanjo, such action is unlikely to deny Obasanjo victory in the southwestern states. END SUMMARY.

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEKEND?

2. (U) In the Southwest, the April 19 poll will especially test the strength and relevance of Afenifere, the most prominent Yoruba socio-cultural interest group. Afenifere leadership has long served as a rallying point for Yorubas. Following the April 12 National Assembly election, Afenifere met with the six Southwest governors, all of whom belong to the AD, to review the results. In that election, the AD lost nearly all of its National Assembly seats to the national ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Apart from AD's success in Lagos State, last weekend's polls marked the first time since Nigeria's independence that a mainstream Yoruba political party has fallen in the Southwest. Unable to fathom a tenable reason for this poor showing, the Afenifere-AD leadership concluded their failure was the PDP's handiwork. They alleged that the PDP manipulated the electoral process and intimidated their supporters.

WHAT'S NEXT? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

3. (U) Top Afenifere and AD leaders, led by Senator Abraham Adesanya, met on April 14 with President Obasanjo to protest "massive rigging" of the National Assembly election. They demanded that the President address the matter quickly or risk losing the Southwest's support. The group warned it would not hesitate to direct its supporters--i.e. the extended Yoruba nation--to cast protest votes against Obasanjo and vote instead for the AD. NOTE: As the AD did not field a presidential candidate of its own, under election rules, such ballots should not count as valid votes but should be reflected in the "rejected votes" total. The damage to Obasanjo would be that the votes he expected from the Southwest would be reduced, forcing him to make up his count elsewhere. If, however, the AD persuades voters to cast their lot with another candidate, especially Buhari, Obasanjo could face a much stiffer contest in the Southwest that would also make the nationwide vote count more competitive. END NOTE.

4. (U) Afenifere's threat raises significant questions about its power in Southwest politics. Do Afenifere leaders really control the Southwest, as they often claim? If last week's National Assembly election was not rigged as they claim, did it reflect a new Southwestern political reality? If so, what is this new reality? Did the Southwestern electorate throw its weight behind the PDP to signify solidarity with

incumbent President Obasanjo, whom they failed to support in 1999? Or, as international observers witnessed in some areas, were Yoruba voters confused about how and for whom to vote in last week's National Assembly election as opposed to this week's presidential election?

15. (SBU) Afenifere and AD will not give up without a fight. They may do everything in this week's election that they accuse the PDP of having done last weekend--rigging, thuggery, bribery, manipulation--to counter a repeat attack by such means. Senator Adesanya has already warned that the AD will forcefully resist any attempt to rig the coming election. The Southwestern governors have all spoken along the same lines. AD leaders may also engage in legal actions. Such desperate measures might yield results favorable to AD in Lagos and Oyo states, but may not make a meaningful impact in Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, or Ogun states.

16. (SBU) COMMENT. This Saturday's election could provide convincing proof of the true state of affairs in the Southwest. We believe the most likely scenario is that Afenifere leaders have lost much of their former control. But, if governors in such states as Ogun, Ekiti, and Osun, where the AD lost nearly everything last week are returned to power this weekend, then Afenifere is right and truly in charge. If the Obasanjo-PDP performance on April 19 drops from their impressive showing on April 12, then something really went wrong for the AD last weekend, and their accusations of rigging carry more weight. The Southwest should be where the action is this election round. END COMMENT.

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